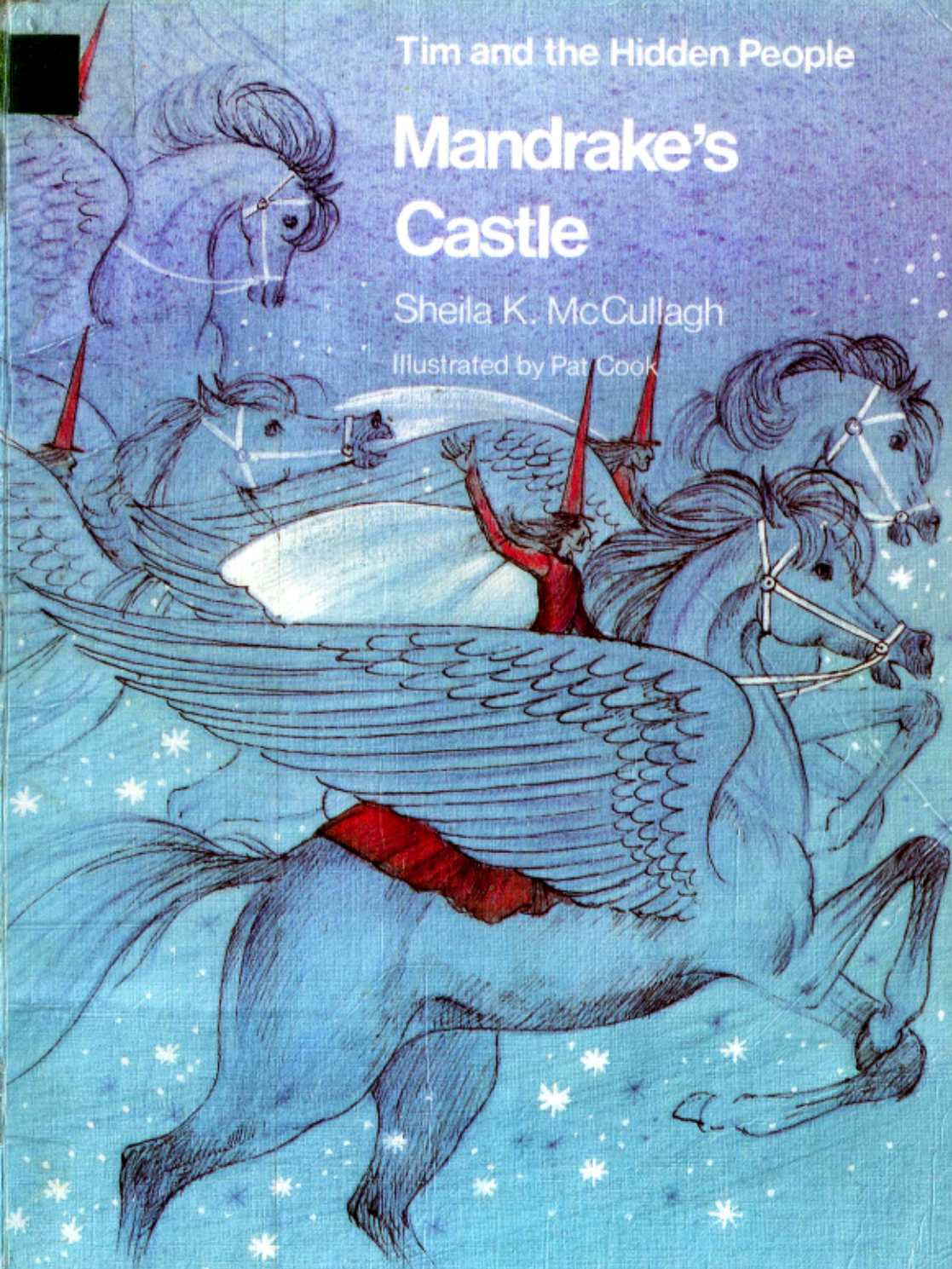


Tim and the Hidden People

# Mandrake's Castle

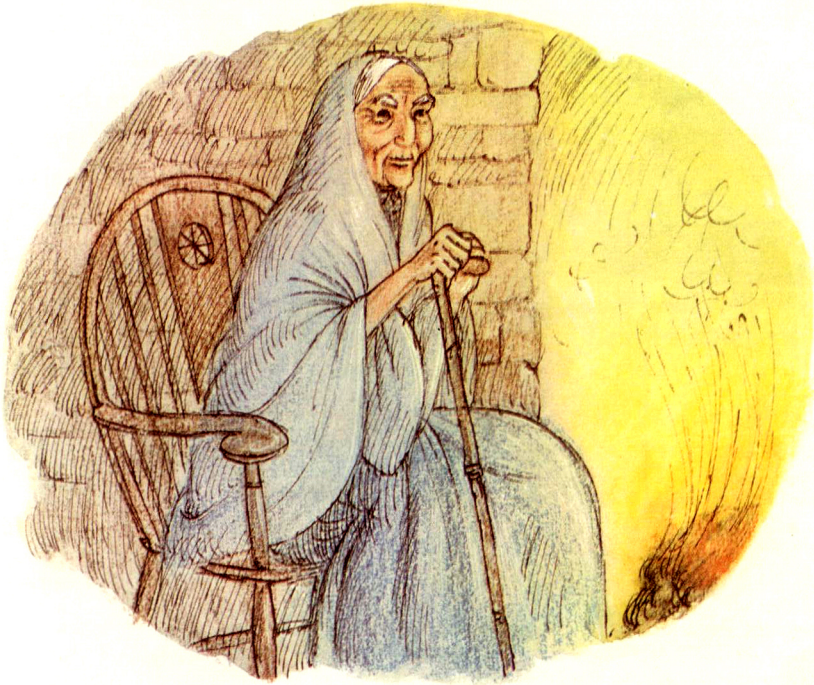
Sheila K. McCullagh

Illustrated by Pat Cook





# **Mandrake's Castle**



Sheila K. McCullagh

Illustrated by Pat Cook



ARNOLD-WHEATON  
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Tim, Nicola and Jeremy found themselves standing in a big hall. There was a log fire to their left, burning in a great stone fireplace. There was a long wooden table down the middle of the hall, with a wooden bench on each side of it. Some silver dishes stood on the table. They were piled high with apples, oranges and some strange fruit which Tim didn't know. The hall was lit by flaming torches, which were stuck into brackets on the walls.

Someone shut the great door behind them, but Tim didn't turn round. His eyes were on the man with one leg. The man went slowly over to the fire, and stood with his back to it, watching them.

"Let us get to know one another," he said softly. "My name is Mandrake."

Tim's head jerked up. He couldn't help it. He seemed to hear Melinda's words echoing in his ears: "... Mandrake – he's the worst of them all".

Mandrake's eyes were on Tim in a moment.

"Perhaps you know the name?" he asked.

Tim said nothing.

"I hope, if you have heard of me, you have heard how much I can help you. You must be Tim? And you are Nicola and Jeremy?"

He looked at each of them, as he said their names, but none of them spoke. They stood still, with their eyes on Mandrake's face.





It wasn't a face to make them feel any happier. Mandrake had a long, thin face, with black, bushy eyebrows. His long hair was pulled back and Tim saw that his ears were pointed, like Knocker's. He stood there smiling at the three of them, but his eyes were shining, as a cat's eyes shine when it looks at a mouse.





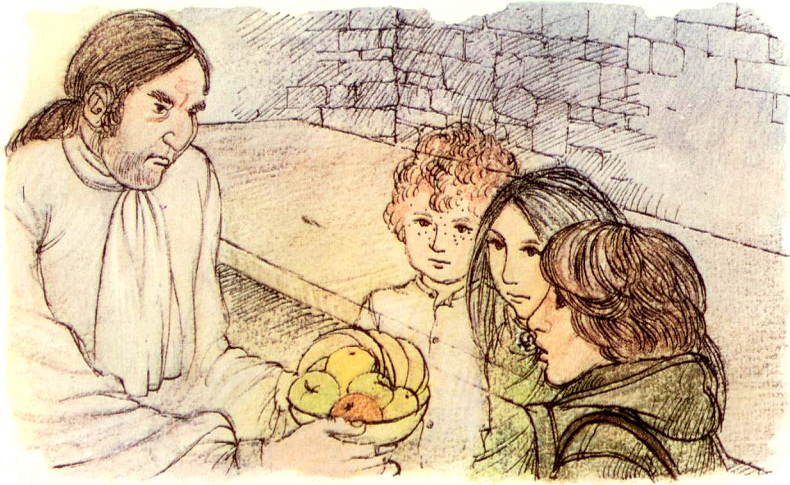
“Sit down,” said Mandrake softly, pointing to the bench by the table. “There is nothing to be afraid of.”

Tim, Nicola and Jeremy sat down on the bench, with their backs to the table. They didn’t take their eyes off Mandrake’s face. Tim felt that somehow he must look into Mandrake’s eyes. He couldn’t turn his own away, when Mandrake looked at him.

“Can none of you talk?” asked Mandrake.

No one said a word.





“Well, if you can’t talk, perhaps you can eat,” said Mandrake softly.

He clapped his hands. One of the men they had seen outside must have been standing behind them. He came forward now. Mandrake pointed to the dishes on the table.

“Take one to the children,” he said.

The man picked up one of the silver dishes and held it out to Tim.

Tim shook his head. His hands lifted towards the fruit, and he had a hard fight to keep them down. He pushed his hands down hard, on to his knees. He wasn’t going to eat any food in Mandrake’s castle. It was too dangerous.

The man looked at Mandrake. Mandrake nodded his head, and the man moved on to Nicola. Nicola took an apple. So did Jeremy.



“Don’t eat it,” cried Tim. “Don’t!”

Jeremy’s hand was going up to his mouth with the apple, but he stopped when Tim spoke. But Nicola didn’t seem even to hear him. Her eyes were on Mandrake.

She opened her mouth to take a bite of the apple.

In a flash, Tim leapt to his feet, tore the apple out of Nicola’s hand, and tossed it into the fire. It landed in the flames, and began to burn with a strange green light.





Tim stepped in front of Nicola, and stood facing Mandrake. Mandrake's face had changed, and for a second Tim thought he was going to strike him. Then Mandrake smiled.

"Well!" he said softly. "So that is what Melinda told you, Tim."

Tim didn't know what he meant, so he stood still, saying nothing. It was strange, but he didn't feel afraid any more, and he found that he could take his eyes off Mandrake's face when he wanted to. He looked at Jeremy. Jeremy was still holding his apple. Tim took it from him, and tossed it into the fire.

Mandrake gave a faint hiss, like a snake. "We're not getting on very well tonight," he said. "Perhaps by tomorrow you will be ready to eat with your friends. Some friends of yours will be here by then, I think, Nicola. Someone down in the south is holding back the wind, but the wind witches are riding the night-mares, and I think they should be here tonight."

“What do you mean—riding the night-mares?” asked Tim. “Nightmares are just bad dreams.”

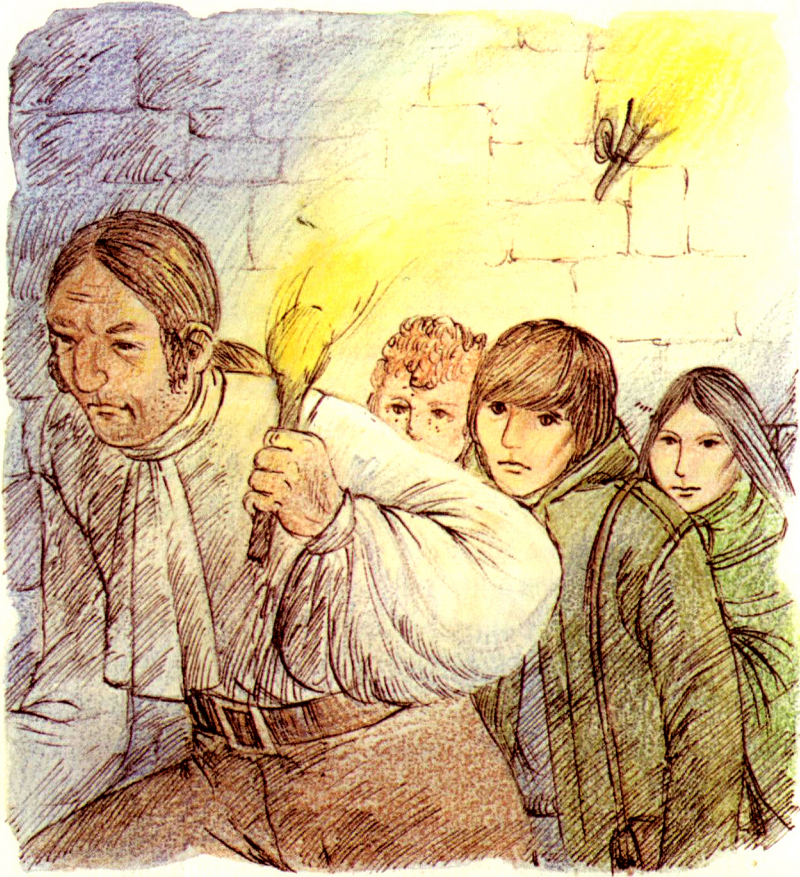
Mandrake smiled. “I can see that you are just one of the Ordinary Folk,” he said. “None of the Hidden People would make such a mistake. Night-mares and night-horses are winged horses, that fly by night. The Ordinary Folk can’t see them—but they sometimes see them in dreams. The wind witches sometimes ride the night-horses—and the night-mares. All kinds of strange people ride them. So when the Ordinary Folk see them in their dreams, they are frightened of them. Somehow the word night-mare seems stranger than night-horse, so that’s what they call them. And in the end they call every bad dream a nightmare.

“You will be frightened of the night-mares, Tim. You’re just one of the Ordinary Folk. But Nicola and Jeremy needn’t be frightened. And don’t be afraid of the wind witches, Nicola. They won’t harm you. They’ll turn you into a wind witch yourself, and what could be better than that? Then you can ride on the wind with the witches, and learn all their spells.”

He nodded to the man, who was still holding the silver dish. The man put it down on the table.

“Follow Cadan,” Mandrake said. “You can wait for the wind witches in a tower in the castle. There is a room ready for you.” He pointed to the stairs. “Don’t give Cadan any trouble, will you? If you give him any trouble, I shall have to chain you up, and that would be a pity.”





Mandrake smiled again, and Tim shivered. He turned, and followed Cadan without a word.

Cadan took one of the torches from a bracket on the wall, and held it up over his head. He led them across the hall, and up the big staircase. Tim saw that another man had come into the hall, and was following them.

Cadan led them along a wide passage, and up another stone staircase.

They went through a door in the wall, and up some stone steps to another door. Cadan opened it, and stood back.

“In there,” he said.

They went past him into a small room. They had just time to see that there were three wooden beds in it, when Cadan shut the door behind them, and they were left in the dark.

“Tim,” said Nicola. “Tim, where are you?”

“I’m here,” said Tim, putting out a hand.

Nicola gripped his arm. Tim could feel that she was shaking.

“There’s a window,” said Jeremy. “Look!”

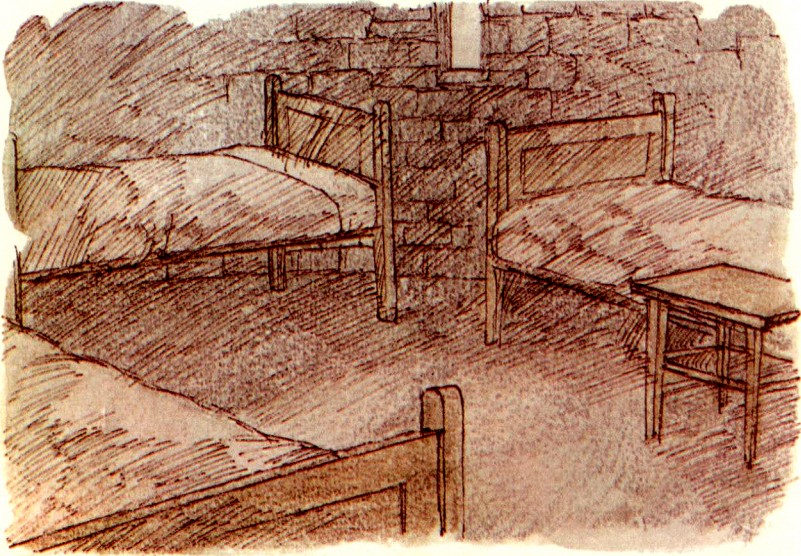
As their eyes got used to the dark, they could see a window in the far wall. Tim went over to it. There was no glass in it. He leant over the thick stone sill. The moon had risen, and he could see the ground below clearly in the moonlight. The castle stood at one end of a lake, and there were pine trees below them. But they were much too high up to jump, and there was no way of climbing down.

“It’s a long way to the ground,” he said, pulling in his head. “Let’s sit down and think for a bit. I’ve got a candle. It would help to have some light.”

Tim pulled the candle out of his pocket, felt for his box of matches, and lit it.



There was a little wooden table by one of the beds, and he set the candle on it. The warm glow of light lit up the little room, and at once they all felt better. They sat down on the beds.



“How did you throw the apple away?” asked Nicola.  
“I didn’t want to eat it, but I couldn’t stop myself.”

“I don’t know,” said Tim. “I just thought we mustn’t eat anything in this place.”

“I couldn’t stop myself,” Nicola said again. She took off her shawl, which was all huddled up around her neck, and shook it out. Tim watched her.

“What’s that brooch you’re wearing?” he asked suddenly.

The candle-light shone on a silver brooch on Nicola's dress. Tim hadn't seen it before. It had been covered by the shawl. But it was shining like silver fire.

"It's a silver brooch I found in the wood, near Melinda's cottage," said Nicola.

"Did Melinda see it?" asked Tim quickly.

Nicola shook her head. "I was going to show it to her," she said, "but when we got back to the cottage, you were there, and I forgot."

"Let me look at it," said Tim.

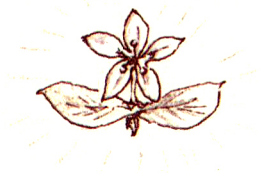
Nicola unpinned the brooch, and handed it to him. Tim looked at it carefully. There were two big leaves on a thin stem, and a little flower in between them. As Tim held it, the brooch seemed to burn his hand. He put it down on the table.

"Don't touch it, Nicola," he said. "I don't know why, but I'm sure you shouldn't wear it. The wild witches were in that wood. One of them may have dropped it."

"But it's very pretty," said Nicola.

"There's something wrong with it," said Tim. "I'm sure there is."

"I do feel better, now I've taken it off," said Nicola. "I don't feel so frightened."







“I’m hungry,” said Jeremy. “It was all very well, not eating those apples, but I’m hungry.”

Tim still had the bag. He pulled out three biscuits, and handed one to Nicola and one to Jeremy.

“Try these,” he said. “They’re safe to eat.”

When Tim had finished his biscuit, he got up, and picked up the candle.

“I don’t expect it will do any good,” he said softly, “but I’m going to try and signal from the window. Sebastian must be out there somewhere, and there’s just a chance he may see a signal.”

“I’d forgotten Sebastian!” cried Nicola.

“Sh!” whispered Tim. “There may be someone listening at the door. They can’t know about Sebastian, or they would have been out looking for him.”

Tim went over to the window. He held the lighted candle for a second, and then pulled it back behind the stone wall. The candle flickered in the wind, but it didn’t go out. Tim showed it again, and then again. Three short flashes. Then he held it out again, but left it there a little longer, before he pulled the light away. He did that three times, too. Three long flashes. Then he did the three short flashes again.

“That’s SOS,” he said to Jeremy, who was standing watching. “Three short flashes, three long ones, and three short ones again. I’ve been signalling to a friend of mine, who lives in The Yard. Sebastian will know what that means, if he sees it.”

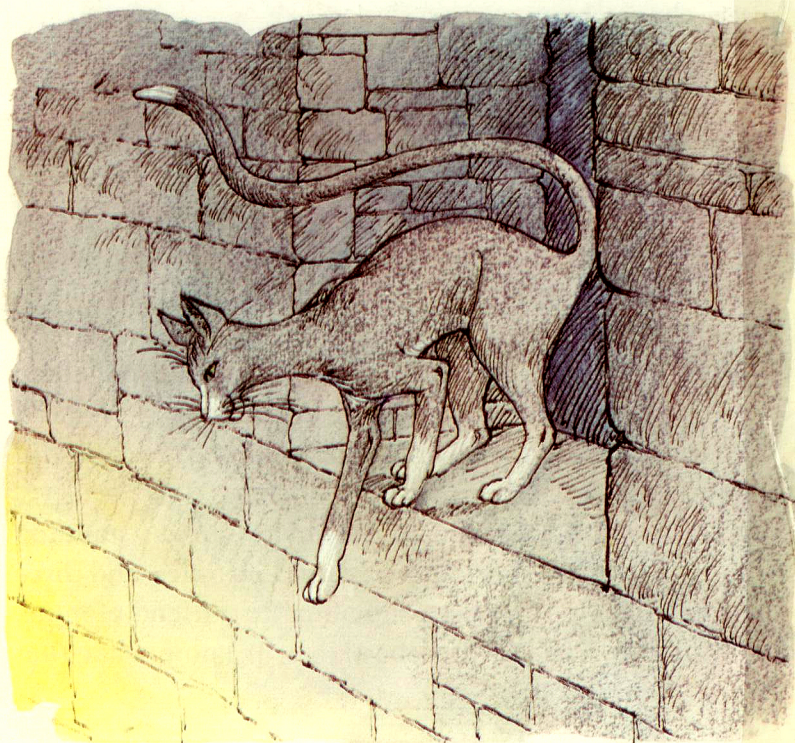


Tim sent the SOS message five or six times, and then turned away from the window.

“We’ll wait a bit, and then I’ll do it again,” he said.

He had just set the candle down on the table, when there was a little questioning purr, and a small cat jumped in on to the window sill, and down into the room. It was Sebastian.

“Sebastian!” whispered Nicola. “Oh, Sebastian, we’re so glad you’ve found us! How did you get up here?”



“I can guess that,” said Jeremy, as Sebastian ran across to Nicola. “I expect there are plenty of broomsticks about, in a place like this.”

Tim went to the window, and looked out.

Jeremy was quite right. A broomstick was floating in the air outside.

“Come on, you two,” he whispered. “We must get away as soon as we can. The witches will be here before long. You first, Nicola. Sebastian can take you down, and come back for Jeremy and me.”

“We must all go together,” said Nicola. “A broomstick will take three of us. We mustn’t leave anyone.”

“All right,” said Tim. “Get back on the broomstick, Sebastian.”

Sebastian jumped on to the stone sill, and out of the window on to the broomstick.

“Now Nicola,” said Tim.

Nicola climbed up, and through the window.

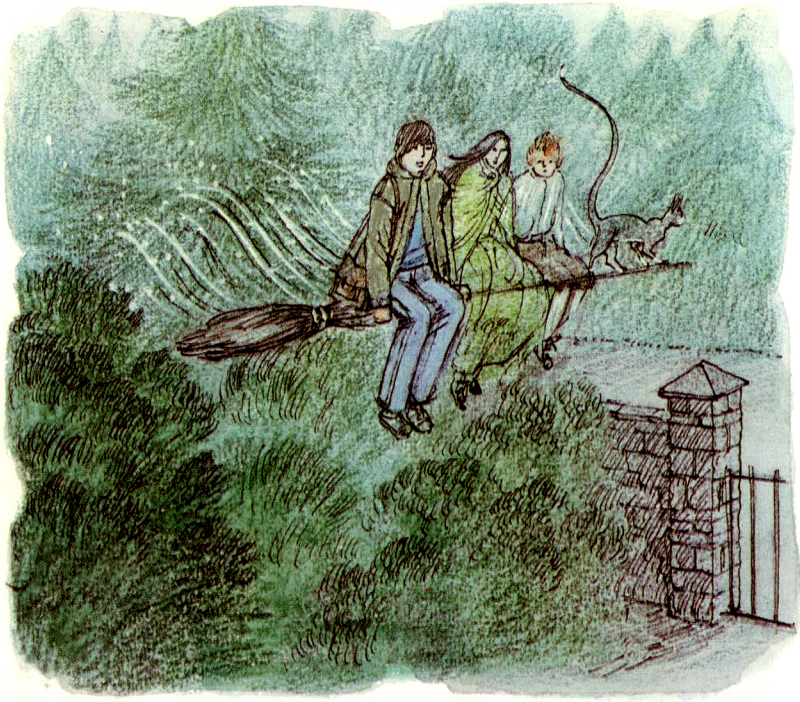
“Jeremy,” said Tim.

Jeremy climbed after Nicola, and slipped on to the broomstick just behind Sebastian.

Tim went back to the table, picked up the candle, blew it out, and put it back in his pocket. Nicola’s silver brooch still lay on the table, shining like silver fire. Tim shivered. He ran back to the window, climbed on to the sill, and out, on to the broomstick. There was just room for him.

Sebastian waved his tail and they set off.





Tim looked down. He could see the front of the castle now, and the drive, and the iron gates. The broomstick seemed to be moving very slowly. It began to drop towards the ground. Sebastian twitched his tail more and more wildly, but the broomstick dropped lower and lower.

"We must be too heavy for it," Tim whispered to Nicola who was next to him.

They dropped slowly down. Tim was glad to see that they were going to clear the iron gates.



They came down on the grass on the other side of the road.

“Where are you taking us, Sebastian? Do you know a safe place?” asked Tim.

Sebastian purred loudly. He twitched his tail, and the broomstick floated a foot off the ground.

“You must go now, Nicola,” said Tim. “Let Sebastian take you and Jeremy. I’ll stay here, and he can come back for me.”

“No!” said Nicola. “No!”

“You must go, Nicola,” said Tim. “It’s the safest way for all of us. We can’t spend the night here, just outside the castle. You *must* go, Nicola, and take Jeremy with you.”

“Come on, Nicola,” said Jeremy. “The sooner we go, the sooner Sebastian can get back. Tim will be all right for a bit.”



Sebastian jumped on the broomstick, and Jeremy sat on the end of it. Nicola still stood in the road.

"You *must* go, Nicola," said Tim again. "It's you the wind witches are looking for, not me."

"All right," said Nicola, "but we're not going far. And if you're not here when Sebastian gets back, I shall come back and look for you."

"Don't worry," said Tim. "I'll be here."

Nicola slipped on to the broomstick. Sebastian waved his tail. The broomstick rose up into the air, and sailed away into the darkness.





Tim watched until the broomstick was out of sight. His eyes were used to the darkness now, and he could see quite well. There were pine trees along the road, and he could see a big tree farther back, behind them.

"I'll get off the road, anyway," he said to himself. He slipped under the pines, and found his way to the big tree. It was an old oak, with a thick trunk and low branches.

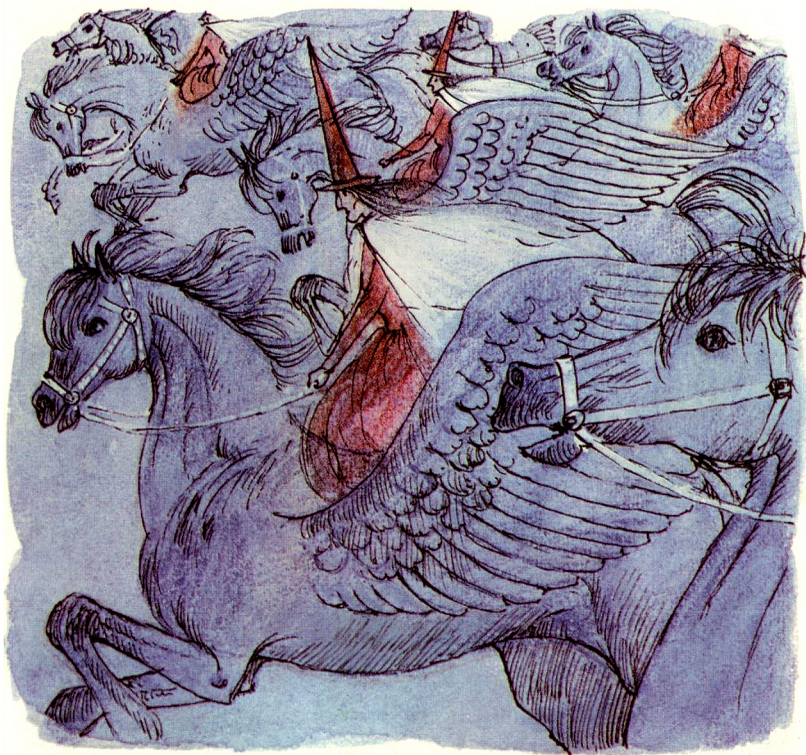
Tim pulled himself up into the tree. It felt as solid as a rock, and much safer than being on the road.





He had just settled himself down on a branch, to wait for Sebastian, when he heard a strange whistle overhead.

He looked up through a gap in the branches of the oak tree. He could see the stars shining in the dark sky. The moon was shining, and the sky was clear.



Then he saw the horses—great, dark blue horses, with wide wings, flying swiftly, high up in the moonlight. There were seven horses, and on the back of each horse, there was a witch. Their silver cloaks were streaming out behind them, and they looked beautiful, in a strange way, as they rode the night-mares across the dark sky overhead.

Tim saw the horses turn over Mandrake's castle, and swoop down, out of sight, towards the door.



Something landed on the road with a clatter. Tim looked down, and saw Sebastian with the broomstick. He slid down the tree as quickly as he could, and pushed his way through the pine trees, back to the road.

“Quick, Sebastian,” he whispered. “The wind witches have come. They’re in the castle. They’ll be out looking for us soon.”

Sebastian twitched his tail, and the broomstick floated off the ground. Tim climbed on to it. Sebastian’s tail twitched again, and they were off, flying low along the road.

The broomstick sailed along less than ten feet above the ground. At first Tim thought the broomstick wouldn’t fly any higher. But then he guessed that Sebastian was flying low, so that they wouldn’t be seen. There were thick woods on each side now, and no one could see them unless he was on the road itself.

Then trees ended, and Tim saw hills rising in front of them. Sebastian left the road, and swung the broomstick out over the moorland. He was still flying very low.

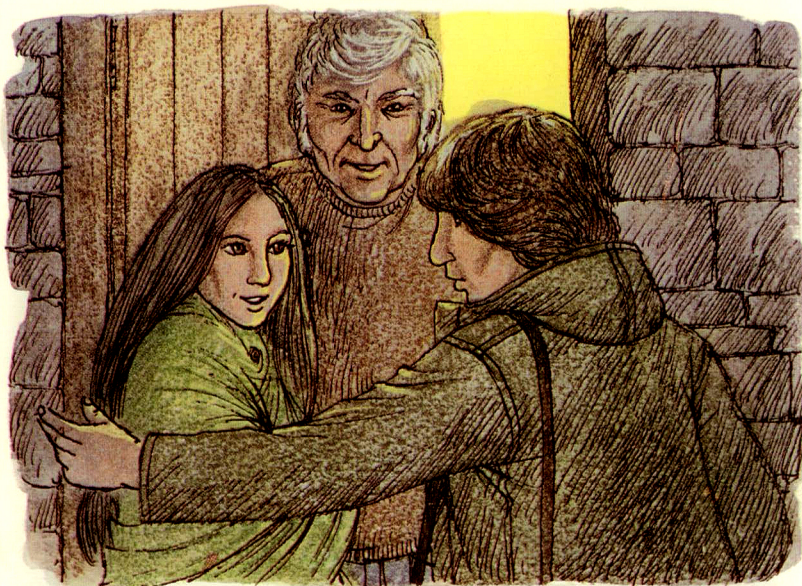
They came to a wide track over the moor. Sebastian swung the broomstick along it. Tim saw a hill rising up in front of them. There was a cottage, with lighted windows, at the foot of the hill. Sebastian seemed to be making for the cottage.

Soon, the broomstick swept down in front of it, and stopped by the door. It was a long, low cottage, and it shone white in the moonlight.



The door opened. Light flooded out from inside the cottage, and Nicola ran out to meet them.





"Tim?" she cried. "Tim? You're all right?"

"Yes," said Tim. "But get inside, Nicola. I'm coming."

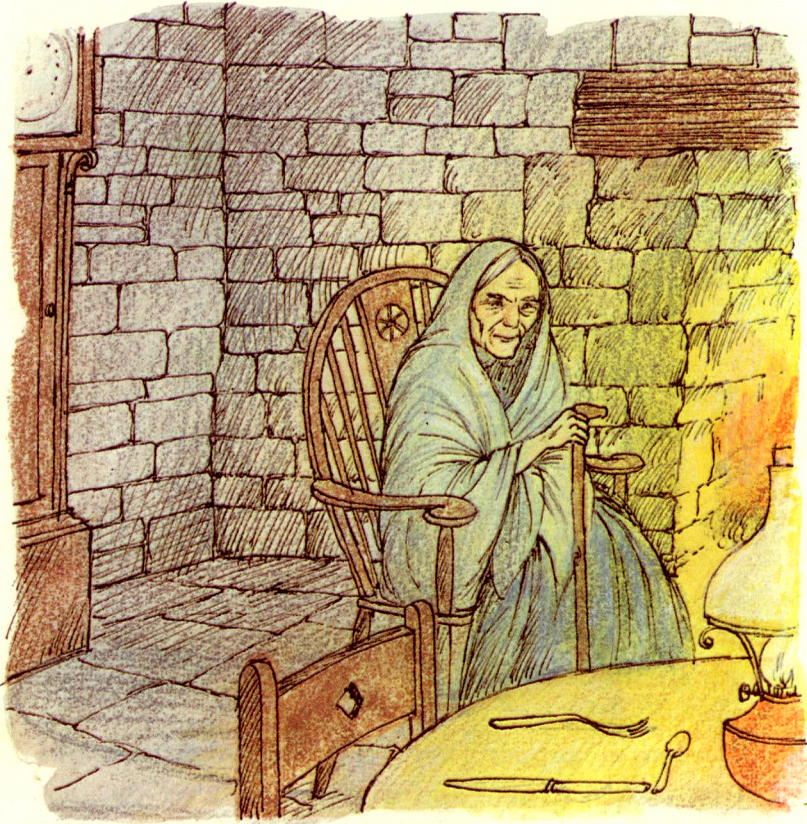
A man was standing in the doorway, watching him. He was a small, thin man, with white hair and a cheerful smile. Tim felt that he could be trusted the moment he saw him.

"Come in, Tim," the man said. "I'm Alan Tremaine."

He stepped to one side, and Tim pushed Nicola quickly through the doorway in front of him. Sebastian slipped inside with them.

"Shut the door," said Tim. "The wind witches have come."

Alan Tremaine banged the door to and locked it.



There was a grandfather clock against one wall, and an old, old lady was sitting by the fire. Tim thought that he had never seen anyone quite so old. She had a pale blue shawl over her white hair, and she looked at Tim with bright blue eyes. She smiled at him, and nodded her head. She looked so kind that Tim smiled back.

"Hallo," he said.



“This is Grandmother Roon, Tim,” said Alan Tremaine. “She’s staying with me for a time. Mandrake has laid a spell on her, and she can’t speak. But I’ve found a way to break the spell. She’ll soon be able to speak again. Sit down at the table, Tim. We’re going to have supper at once, and as we eat, you can tell me everything that has happened. Nicola has told me a little already. Sit down at the table.”

A peat fire was burning on the hearth, and a lamp stood on a table in front of the fire. There were three chairs round the table. It was set with knives and forks and spoons. As they sat down, Alan Tremaine went out to a little kitchen. He came back with a tray, with three plates of eggs and bacon and a saucer of fish. He set a plate in front of each of them, and then put the saucer on the table. Sebastian jumped up on the table, and sat down by the saucer.

“I’ve had my supper. Don’t wait,” said Alan Tremaine.

It all looked so safe and so ordinary, after the dark night outside, that Tim found it difficult to believe that he was awake.

Alan Tremaine went into the kitchen, and came back again with four mugs of tea and a saucer of milk on the tray. He put the milk on the table for Sebastian, and set a mug of tea down beside each of them. Then he took the last mug himself, put down the tray, and sat down on a chair by the fire.



“Now tell me what has been happening, Tim,” he said. “Tell me everything you can remember, from the time you left The Yard with Melinda.”

Tim began. When once he started, the story poured out of him. Alan Tremaine listened, saying nothing. When Tim ended by telling them all how he had seen the witches come riding in on the night-mares, even Jeremy stopped eating to listen, and Sebastian sat with his head up, and his big ears turned towards Tim.





When Tim had finished, no one said anything for a minute or two. Then Alan Tremaine nodded his head thoughtfully.

“You were right to leave the brooch behind, Tim,” he said. “Do you know what it was? Two leaves on a stem, and a flower between them? That was a mandrake flower, Nicola. It must have been dropped by one of the wild witches. As soon as you put that on, Mandrake would know where you were.”

“But how?” asked Tim.

“Do you know how the Ordinary Folk sometimes track animals, when they are studying them?” asked Alan. “They catch an animal, and fasten a tiny radio on it. The radio gives out a signal, and the men can pick up the signal miles away. The animal can wander about, and it seems to be quite free, but the men can always find it when they want to. The brooch acted like that for Mandrake. It sent some strange signal to him, so that he could tell where you were. I expect you got away because he didn’t bother to set guards around the castle, when he knew Nicola was wearing the brooch. If you had still been wearing it when you left, Nicola, he would have known at once. But you left it in the tower, so he must have thought you were still there. That’s good. It means that he doesn’t know where you are now. Nor do the wind witches. You got away just in time.”

Alan Tremaine turned to Grandmother Roon.

“There’s nothing more we can do tonight,” he said. “I’ll help you into the other room. The children can sleep in here by the fire.”

He helped the old lady to her feet, and across to the other room, while the other three finished their supper. The fire began to burn low.

“Time for bed for you too,” said Alan Tremaine, coming back to the fire. “It’s nearly morning.”

He went out of the room and came back with some blankets and pillows, which he tossed down on the floor.

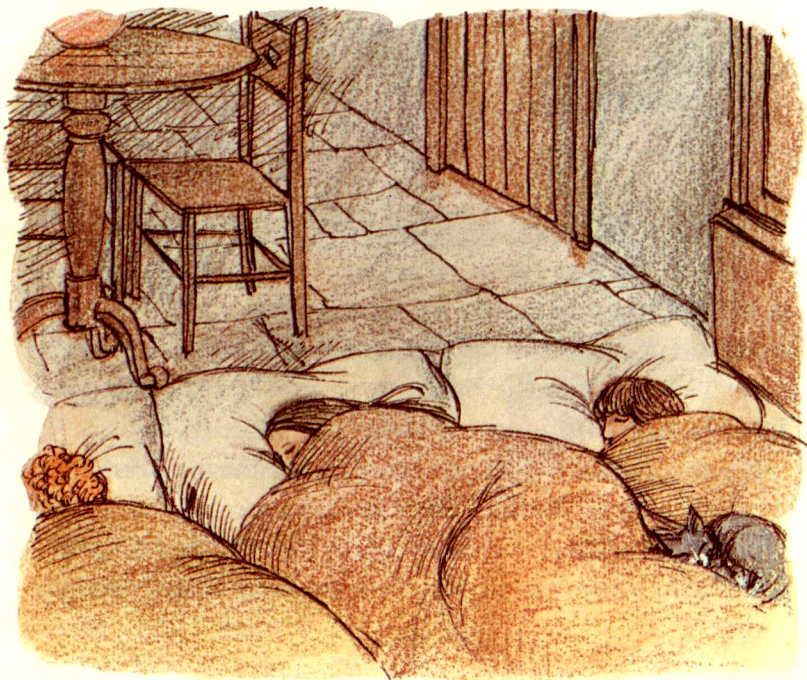


“Make yourselves comfortable,” he said. “I’m going out for a time. You can lock the door after me. I’ve got a key. You’ll be quite safe here.”

He put some more peat on the fire, picked up a tall stick, and went out.

Tim locked the door and they lay down. The wind witches were in Mandrake’s castle, but they all felt very safe by Alan Tremaine’s fire.

Ten minutes later, there was no sound in the cottage but the ticking of the clock, and no light, except the glow of the peat fire.



## **FLIGHTPATH TO READING**

### **A Series**

1. Tim and Tobias
2. All the Fun of the Fair
3. Tim Meets Captain Jory
4. Tim and the Smugglers
5. Tim and the Witches
6. The Highwayman
7. Magic in The Yard
8. The Key

### **B Series**

1. The Return of the Key
2. Captain Jory Lends a Hand
3. The Stump People
4. Watchers in The Yard
5. Red for Danger
6. At the House of the Safe Witch
7. Tim in Hiding
8. On the Night of the Full Moon

### **C Series**

1. The Pool by the Whispering Trees
2. Tim in Trouble
3. On the Road to the North
4. Riding into Danger
5. Mandrake's Castle
6. Escape by Night
7. Three Fires on the Dark Tower
8. Tim Rides on the Ghost Bus

### **D Series**

1. News from the North
2. The Cry in the Dark
3. The Shield Stone
4. The Storm over the Sea
5. The Cave of the Wind Witches
6. In Diaman's Cave
7. Danger on the Moor
8. At the Hill of the Stone Prisons



# Flightpath to Reading C5

